

MUTUAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE
IN CUSTOMS MATTERS

ARTICLE 1

Definitions

For the purposes of this Annex:

- (a) "applicant authority" means a competent customs authority or other administrative authority which has been designated by a Party for this purpose and which makes a request for assistance on the basis of this Annex;
- (b) "breach of customs legislation" means any violation or attempted violation of customs legislation;
- (c) "customs legislation" means any legal, regulatory or binding administrative provision applicable in the territories of the Parties, governing the import, export and transit of goods and their placing under any other customs regime, procedure or operation, including measures of prohibition, restriction and control;

- (d) "information" means data in any form, documents, records, reports and copies of these that may be certified or legalised;
- (e) "personal data" means all information relating to an identified or identifiable individual; and
- (f) "requested authority" means a competent customs authority or other administrative authority which has been designated by a Party for this purpose and which receives a request for assistance on the basis of this Annex.

ARTICLE 2

Scope

1. The Parties shall assist each other, in the areas within their competence, in the manner and under the conditions laid down in this Annex, to ensure the correct application of the customs legislation, in particular by preventing, investigating and combating breaches of customs legislation.

2. Assistance in customs matters, as provided for in this Annex, shall apply to any customs authority or other administrative authority of the Parties which is competent for the application of this Annex. It shall not prejudice the rules governing mutual assistance in criminal matters, nor shall it cover information obtained under powers exercised at the request of a judicial authority, except where communication of such information is authorised by that authority.
3. Assistance to recover duties, taxes or fines is not covered by this Annex.

ARTICLE 3

Assistance on Request

1. At the request of the applicant authority, the requested authority shall provide all relevant information which may enable it to ensure that customs legislation is correctly applied, including information regarding activities noted or planned which are or could constitute breaches of customs legislation.
2. At the request of the applicant authority, the requested authority shall inform:
 - (a) whether goods exported from the territory of one of the Parties have been imported into the territory of the other Party in observance of the applicable customs legislation, specifying, where appropriate, the customs procedure applied to the goods;

- (b) whether goods imported into the territory of one of the Parties have been exported from the territory of the other Party in observance of the applicable customs legislation, specifying, where appropriate, the customs procedure applied to the goods.
- 3. At the request of the applicant authority, the requested authority shall, within the framework of its legal or regulatory provisions, take the necessary steps to ensure special surveillance of:
 - (a) natural or legal persons in respect of whom there are grounds for believing that they are or have been involved in committing breaches of customs legislation;
 - (b) places where stocks of goods have been or may be assembled in such a way that there are grounds for believing that these goods are intended to be used in committing breaches of customs legislation;
 - (c) goods that are or may be transported in such a way that there are grounds for believing that they are intended to be used in committing breaches of customs legislation;
 - (d) means of transport that are or may be used in such a way that there are grounds for believing that they are intended to be used in committing breaches of customs legislation.

ARTICLE 4

Spontaneous Assistance

The Parties shall assist each other, at their own initiative and in accordance with their legal or regulatory provisions, if they consider that to be necessary for the correct application of customs legislation, particularly by providing information obtained pertaining to:

- (a) activities which are or appear to be operations in breach of customs legislation and which may be of interest to the other Party;
- (b) new means or methods employed in carrying out operations in breach of customs legislation;
- (c) goods known to be subject to operations in breach of customs legislation;
- (d) natural or legal persons in respect of whom there are grounds for believing that they are or have been involved in breaches of customs legislation;
- (e) means of transport in respect of which there are grounds for believing that they have been, are, or may be used in breaches of customs legislation.

ARTICLE 5

Delivery and Notification

1. At the request of the applicant authority, the requested authority shall, in accordance with legal or regulatory provisions applicable to the latter, take all necessary measures in order to deliver any documents or to notify any decisions, emanating from the applicant authority and falling within the scope of this Annex, to an addressee residing or established in the territory of the requested authority.
2. Requests for delivery of documents or notification of decisions shall be made in writing in an official language of the requested authority or in a language acceptable to that authority.

ARTICLE 6

Form and Substance of Requests for Assistance

1. Requests pursuant to this Annex shall be made in writing. They shall be accompanied by the documents necessary to enable compliance with the request. When required because of the urgency of the situation, oral requests may be accepted, but shall be confirmed in writing no later than five days after the oral request. In the event that this condition is not met, the requested authority may disregard the request or consider it as not having been presented.

2. Requests pursuant to paragraph 1 shall include the following information:
- (a) the applicant authority and if possible, the name of the responsible officer;
 - (b) the requested authority;
 - (c) the assistance requested;
 - (d) the object of and the reason for the request;
 - (e) the legal or regulatory provisions and other legal elements on which the request is based;
 - (f) indications as exact and comprehensive as possible on the natural or legal persons who are the target of the investigations;
 - (g) a summary of the relevant facts and of the enquiries already carried out; and
 - (h) indicate if it would not itself be able to provide the requested assistance if it were to receive such a request.

3. Requests shall be submitted in an official language of the requested authority or in a language acceptable to that authority. This requirement shall not apply to any documents that accompany the request under paragraph 1.
4. If a request does not meet the formal requirements set out above, its correction or completion may be requested; in the meantime, precautionary measures may be ordered in accordance with the legal or regulatory provisions of the requested authority.

ARTICLE 7

Execution of Requests

1. In order to comply with a request for assistance, the requested authority shall proceed, within the limits of its competence and available resources, as though it were acting on its own account or at the request of other authorities of that same Party, by supplying information already possessed, by carrying out appropriate enquiries or by arranging for them to be carried out. This provision shall also apply to any other authority to which the request has been addressed by the requested authority when the latter cannot act on its own.
2. Requests for assistance shall be executed in accordance with the legal or regulatory provisions of the requested Party and in accordance with this Annex.

3. Duly authorised officials of a Party may, with the agreement of the other Party involved and subject to the conditions laid down by the latter, be present to obtain in the offices of the requested authority or any other concerned authority in accordance with paragraph 1, information relating to activities that are or may constitute breaches of customs legislation which the applicant authority needs for the purposes of this Annex.
4. Duly authorised officials of a Party involved may, with the agreement of the other Party involved and subject to the conditions laid down by the latter, be present at enquiries carried out in the latter's territory.
5. In the event that the requested authority is not itself competent to comply with the request for assistance, it shall transmit the request to the competent service and notify the applicant authority of the measures taken.

ARTICLE 8

Form in which Information is to be Communicated

1. The requested authority shall communicate results of enquiries to the applicant authority in writing together with relevant documents, certified or legalised copies or other items.
2. This information may be provided in computerised form or by electronic means.

3. Original documents shall be transmitted only upon request in cases where certified or legalised copies would be insufficient. These originals shall be returned at the earliest opportunity.

ARTICLE 9

Exceptions to the Obligation to Provide Assistance

1. Assistance may be refused or may be subject to the satisfaction of certain conditions or requirements, in cases where a Party considers that assistance under this Annex would:
 - (a) be likely to prejudice the sovereignty of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama or that of a Member State of the European Union which has been requested to provide assistance under this Annex; or
 - (b) be likely to prejudice public policy, security or other essential interests, in particular in the cases referred to under Article 10, paragraph 2; or
 - (c) violate an industrial, commercial or professional secret.

2. Assistance may be postponed by the requested authority on the ground that it will interfere with an ongoing investigation, prosecution or proceeding. In such a case, the requested authority shall consult with the applicant authority to determine if assistance can be given subject to such terms or conditions as the requested authority may require.
3. Where the applicant authority seeks assistance which it would itself be unable to provide if so requested, it shall draw attention to that fact in its request. It shall then be for the requested authority to decide how to respond to such a request.
4. For the cases referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2, the decision of the requested authority and the reasons therefore must be communicated to the applicant authority without delay.

ARTICLE 10

Information Exchange and Confidentiality

1. Any information communicated pursuant to this Annex shall be treated as confidential or restricted in nature, depending on the rules applicable in each of the Parties. It shall be covered by the obligation of confidentiality or professional secrecy as applicable in each of the Parties, and shall enjoy the protection extended to this type of information, in accordance with the legal and regulatory provisions of each Party.

2. Personal data may be exchanged, in accordance with each Party's legislation, only where the Party which may receive them undertakes to protect such data in at least an equivalent way to the one applicable to that particular case in the Party that may supply them.
3. The use, in judicial or administrative proceedings instituted in respect of breaches of customs legislation, of information obtained under this Annex, is considered to be for the purposes of this Annex. Therefore, the Parties may, in their records of evidence, reports and testimonies and in proceedings and charges brought before the courts, use as evidence, information obtained and documents consulted in accordance with the provisions of this Annex. The competent authority which supplied that information or gave access to those documents shall be notified of such use.
4. Information obtained shall be used solely for the purposes of this Annex. Where one of the Parties wishes to use such information for other purposes, it shall obtain the prior written consent of the authority which provided the information. Such use shall then be subject to any restrictions laid down by that authority.

ARTICLE 11

Experts and Witnesses

An official of a requested authority may be authorised to appear, within the limitations of the authorisation granted, as an expert or witness in judicial or administrative proceedings regarding the matters covered by this Annex, and produce such objects, documents or certified or legalised copies thereof, as may be needed for the proceedings. The request for appearance must indicate specifically before which judicial or administrative authority the official will have to appear, on what matters and by virtue of what title or qualification the official will be questioned.

ARTICLE 12

Assistance Expenses

The Parties shall waive all claims on each other for the reimbursement of expenses incurred pursuant to this Annex, except, as appropriate, for expenses to experts and witnesses, and those to interpreters and translators who are not public service employees.

ARTICLE 13

Implementation

1. The implementation of this Annex shall be entrusted to the customs authorities or other competent authorities of the Parties, who shall adopt all practical measures and arrangements necessary for its application. They may recommend to the competent bodies amendments which they consider should be made to this Annex.
2. The Parties shall consult each other and subsequently keep each other informed of the detailed rules of implementation which are adopted in accordance with the provisions of this Annex.

ARTICLE 14

Other Agreements

1. Taking into account the respective competencies of the European Union and its Member States on the one hand and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama on the other, the provisions of this Annex shall:
 - (a) not affect the obligations of the Parties under any other international agreement or convention;

- (b) be deemed complementary to Agreements on mutual assistance which have been or may be concluded between individual Member States of the European Union and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama or between these countries; and
 - (c) not affect the European Union's provisions governing the communication between the competent services of the European Commission and the customs authorities of the Member States of the European Union of any information obtained under this Annex which could be of interest to the European Union.
2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1(b), the provisions of this Annex shall take precedence over the provisions of any bilateral Agreement on mutual assistance which has been or may be concluded between individual Member States of the European Union and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama insofar as the provisions of the latter are incompatible with those of this Annex.
3. In respect of questions relating to the applicability of this Annex, the Parties shall consult each other to resolve the matter in the framework of the Sub-Committee on Customs, Trade Facilitation and Rules of Origin established under Article 123 of Chapter 3 of Title II (Trade in Goods) of Part IV of this Agreement.
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